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SUBJECT: STRONG ETHNIC SHOWING AT NLD'S 14TH ANNIVERSARY

Classified By: COM CARMEN M. MARTINEZ FOR REASON 1.5(D).

11. (SBU) Summary: Amidst strong support from Western diplomats and ethnic representatives the NLD celebrated its 14th anniversary on September 27 in downtown Rangoon. NLD leaders called for the SPDC to enter into dialogue without delay for the benefit of the country. An array of leaders from ethnic parties pledged to continue working hand in hand with the NLD. End Summary.

12. (SBU) The NLD celebrated its 14th anniversary on September 27 with a ceremony at its headquarters in downtown Rangoon. Approximately 500 people attended the ceremony, including NLD members, ethnic party leaders, Ambassadors from the United States, Australia, Britain, France, and Germany, staff from the Indian, Japanese, and Norwegian embassies (ASEAN countries were notably absent), the WHO country representative, UNICEF staff, and local press.

13. (SBU) NLD General Secretary Aung San Suu Kyi gave a brief keynote address saying that on her recent trips around the country she has seen that people lack security. She stated that the SPDC should not try to break the people but work for their benefit and the benefit of the country. On a conciliatory note, she said that the NLD wants to work for the "national cause," calling on the SPDC to join hands with the NLD to enjoy the fruits of democracy.

14. (SBU) NLD Vice Chairman U Tin Oo then read a lengthy statement recounting the origins of the party in 1988 and what it stood for then and still stands for today i.e., that sovereignty descends from the people, that human dignity is not to be crushed under foot, that free and fair elections must be held, that the rights of minorities must be respected, and that there must be equality before the law. He then gave a brief historical overview of the 1990 elections, the SLORC's "failure to honor" the election results, and subsequent problems with the National Convention. He noted that it is imperative to have a practicing democracy to solve the political, economic, social, educational, and health problems of Burma and challenged the SPDC to work together with the NLD for the benefit of the people.

15. (SBU) Turning up the heat just a little, U Tin Oo recalled that upon ASSK's release in May the SPDC declared that it was "opening a new historic page," noting that these words can only be meaningful if there is dialogue between the SPDC and NLD. He clarified that there has been no dialogue yet, neither a "defacto" dialogue nor a "low-level" dialogue, and said the SPDC must have the will to engage in dialogue. He called for the release of all political prisoners "without any further delay" and said the NLD's policies on the results of the 1990 election, the National Convention which started in 1993, the drawing of the National Constitution, foreign investment, and tourism will remain unchanged until there is substantive and meaningful dialogue.

16. (SBU) The leaders of virtually all prominent, and some obscure, ethnic political parties were in attendance and several took the podium to read letters of felicitation and to pledge their support to the NLD and Aung San Suu Kyi. Leaders from the Shan State Kokang Democratic Party, the United Nationalities League for Democracy, the Mon National Democratic Front, the Kamans National League for Democracy, the United Nationalities Alliance, and the 23 Veterans group read letters of support for the NLD. Sitting with the NLD Central Executive Committee were leaders from the Mon, Zomi (Chin), Arakan, Shan, Karen, Kachin, and Karenni parties represented in the 1990 elections. U Aye Tha Aung, the Arakan League for Democracy leader who serves as Secretary on the Committee Representing the Peoples' Parliament, was also in attendance.

17. (C) Comment: The NLD, and particularly Aung San Suu Kyi, continued to call for political progress in a non-confrontational manner. They noted the urgent need for political change to address growing problems in the country without putting the blame on the SPDC for the deteriorating conditions. Unfortunately, it does not look like the non-confrontational approach is bearing fruit, and it will be difficult to sustain over the long run without some progress.

Clearly the most significant aspect of the ceremony was the support shown by the ethnic parties. Not only did they show up in force at the event, they publicly stated that they are working hand in hand with the NLD and would continue to do so. This strengthens the NLD's claim that it enjoys the support of the ethnic groups. Whether it works to encourage or discourage the SPDC to enter into dialogue, time will tell. End Comment.
Martinez